

Alaska Section of Epidemiology (SOE) Guidance for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Testing in Alaska

October 7, 2022

Key Points

- All facilities or organizations that administer or interpret COVID-19 testing must report laboratory-confirmed cases of COVID-19 to SOE preferentially via an electronic method. As of August 8, 2022, facilities that are not able to report NEGATIVE results electronically should discontinue sending them via fax. Detailed Alaska Reporting Guidance can be found [here](#).
- SOE staff can be reached for consultation at **907-269-8000** or **800-478-0084** (after-hours).
- The Alaska State Public Health Laboratories in Anchorage (ASPHL) and Fairbanks (ASVL) are running specimens 5 days per week (M–F, excluding holidays) at both facilities. Specimens must be submitted with a [Respiratory Pathogen Test Request form](#).
- Testing locations can be found [here](#). Sites performing public testing should provide updates on their testing hours and information.
- The testing landscape of COVID-19 has evolved over the past 3 years with more readily available at-home testing and reduction of free community testing sites. Therefore, overarching principles for COVID-19 response include 1) symptomatic people should act to minimize transmission to others by isolating until after symptoms have improved; 2) testing can assist in confirming a diagnosis and ensuring that those with high-risk conditions can be connected to treatment services; and 3) pharmaceutical interventions (e.g., vaccination and treatment) and non-pharmaceutical interventions (e.g., masks, social distancing, and improving ventilation) can reduce transmission and/or reduce severe outcomes from COVID-19.

Test Anybody in Alaska Who Is Experiencing Symptoms of COVID-19

- **Symptomatic people should be tested regardless of their vaccination status.** If testing is not feasible, people should isolate until they are at least fever free for >24 hours and have improvement of symptoms to avoid spreading any respiratory infections to others.
 - Symptoms of COVID-19 may include any of the following: fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, chills, decreased appetite, diminished sense of taste or smell, diarrhea, fatigue, headache, muscle/joint aches, nausea, rash, rigors, runny nose, sore throat, or sputum production.
- Antigen testing is an acceptable first-line test for COVID-19 infection in most scenarios. Molecular tests are not as widely available as in the past.
 - Consider serial antigen testing or confirmatory testing with a molecular test for a negative antigen test result especially if the person is at high risk of severe disease and may be eligible for [treatments](#).
- Given the wide availability of self-testing resources, organizations with difficulty funding and maintaining operations for on-site COVID testing programs could consider accepting antigen self-test results.
- An overview of testing for SARS-CoV2 can be found [here](#).

Screening Testing for Asymptomatic Persons

Requirements or recommendations for routine screening may be present in some venues or local communities following an exposure or due to local/employer/business policy.

- Upon admission to a health care facility based on facility policy.
- Residents and staff living or working in nursing homes and long-term care facilities (LTCF) should follow [CDC guidance](#).
 - Email questions specific to these settings to hss.dph.epi.ltc.covidreporting@alaska.gov.
- CDC guidance for testing of healthcare workers is available [here](#).
- Information for those who work or live at a seafood processing facility is available [here](#).
- CDC guidance for testing in schools is available [here](#).

- Organizations and entities not covered by specific CDC guidance should make decisions about screening policies based on their own risk assessments of the populations they serve or employ.
- CDC's travel recommendations can be found [here](#).
- CMS update on CLIA EUA COVID-19 testing exceptions can be found [here](#).

Isolation and Precautions Guidance

- CDC's isolation guidance for the general public is available [here](#).
- Quarantine is no longer recommended for the general public; however, persons who are exposed should consider taking [certain precautions](#) to include watching for symptoms and testing.
- Guidance specific to health care workers and health care settings are available [here and here \(updated September 2022\)](#).
- Guidance specific to K-12 school settings is available [here](#).
- Asymptomatic persons who had tested positive on a molecular test may discontinue isolation if they have two subsequent negative molecular tests obtained at least 24 hours apart. If at any point clinically compatible symptoms develop, the patient should be placed into isolation and retested.

At-Home or OTC Testing

The Alaska over-the-counter (OTC) COVID-19 testing guidance is available [here](#).

- Positive OTC tests that are self-collected and self-interpreted do not have to be reported to SOE.
- CDC information about at-home testing is available [here](#).

Specimen Type and Priority (based on [CDC Guidance](#))

- FDA guidance on swabs and specimen transport media is available [here](#).
- A nasopharyngeal (NP) collection guidance video is available [here](#).
- Maintain [proper infection control](#) when collecting specimens.

Sequencing and Variant Detection

- All positive specimens collected in UTM/VTM or any Hologic Aptima Direct Load tubes should be submitted to ASVL for sequencing. Re-collection is not necessary; submit the remainder of the specimen.
- Specimens that are not collected in UTM/VTM or Hologic Aptima Direct Load tubes cannot be sequenced (this includes most specimens tested on rapid antigen assays).
- Specimens sent within 2 weeks of collection are prioritized.
- Send positive specimens as Category B samples to ASVL in Fairbanks, per [shipping instructions](#).
- For more information about sequencing SARS-CoV-2 in Alaska, click [here](#).
- For the most recent Alaska SARS-CoV-2 genomics results, please visit the [genomics dashboard](#).

Serologic Testing

- SARS-CoV-2 serologic test results are not reportable; Alaska Reporting Guidance can be found [here](#).
- CDC's interim guidelines on antibody testing are [here](#).
- Regardless of their serology results, symptomatic patients should be tested for COVID-19 via molecular or antigen methods.
- [CDC does not recommend](#) antibody testing after vaccination. One reason why antibody testing is not recommended following vaccination is that cell-mediated immunity may contribute to vaccine-induced immunity, and cell-mediated immunity is not assessed by antibody assays.

Please check the [DOH COVID-19 website](#) and [CDC's COVID-19 website](#) frequently for updates.